



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ASTROPHEL, THE PURITAN

In "the vain amatorious poem of Sir Philip Sidney's 'Arcadia,' " Princess Pamela offers in her distress a prayer, of which these sentences are a part:

Let my faults by Thy hand be corrected, and make not mine unjust enemy the minister of Thy Justice. But yet, my God, if in Thy Wisdom, this be the aptest chastisement for my inexcusable folly, if this low bondage be fitted for my overhigh desires, if the pride of my not enough humble heart be thus to be broken, O Lord, I yield it to Thy Will, and joyfully embrace what sorrow Thou wilt have me suffer.

The appropriate words gave some comfort to Charles the First on the eve of his execution; a pathetic circumstance which the Puritans were glad to use to his discredit, Milton, among them, writing censoriously of a king so frail as to quiet his last agony by an invocation at once the supposed prayer of a heathen and part of a vain, erotic fiction. So far had the moral temper of England changed in the half century which separated Sidney from Cromwell!

Much stress is laid on the vigour of the later period, so that we have almost forgotten that the earlier had its own graceful and not less vigorous principles of conduct. We have come to regard Sidney and his friends only as men of the world, or as scholars, to turn anywhere rather than to the sonnets of Astrophel for the sweeter flowers of English morality. Nevertheless, a few blossoms of an attractive sort may be found just there by those interested in this sort of growth.

Although a charming courtly playfulness of love mingles in Sidney's verse, with earnestness of aspiration and simplicity of vision, the separate qualities are not blended in his mind, as blood and judgment are blended in Shakespeare's heart. Some of the sonnets are like rival poets' phrases inextricably tangled in one rhyme-system. Here he smiles down certain faults of style:

Let dainty wits cry on the Sisters nine,
That, bravely masked, their fancies may be told;
Or Pindar's apes flaunt they in phrases fine,
Enamelling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold.

Here he is the exemplar (a most impeccable one) of the same faults:

Queen Virtue's Court, which some call Stella's face,
Prepared by Nature's choicest furniture,
Hath his front built of alabaster pure.
Gold is the covering of that stately place.

And so with the door of coral, the locks of pearl, until the end of the fourteenth line is achieved. To be sure, such divergence of resolution and performance is not without charm; but, after the admission of the undeniable, one agrees that the poems and passages which bring one nearest the altitude of Shakespeare are those of moral conflict rather than courtly playing. Not quite to the Shakesperean height. Shakespeare did not need to turn from passion to be strong; he, and he alone, knew love from its lowest saurian slime to its blossoming in the highest heaven of the thrice-chastened heart; whether ruled by desire or by reason, he was all love. Sidney had to turn from love to find his noblest self.

Even before he was capable of that great renunciation, it is in calm reasoning, rather than in his splendid playing, that he is most capable of utterance which takes hold. There is a certain well-known passage:

If that be sin which doth the manners frame,
Well staid with truth in word and faith in deed,
Ready of wit and fearing naught but shame;
If that be sin which in fixed hearts doth breed
A loathing of all loose unchastity,
Then love is sin, and let me sinful be!

Let that fine response to an anxious friend be read with some of the stronger love-phrasing, with this, for one:

But finding not those restless flames in me
Which others said did make their souls to pine,
I thought those babes of some pin's hurt did whine,
By my soul judging what love's pain might be.
But while I thus with this young lion played,
Mine eyes — shall I say curst or blest? — beheld
Stella; now she is named need more be said?

“But while I thus with this young lion played!” The lines include that fine one, but one fine line will not let them stand

by the other verses with those whose hearts know Shakespeare's love.

This turning away from dalliance to calm reason is seldom accomplished without graceful insurgence. He would dream of a realm of love over which reason had no control, prayed conscience to abdicate one little corner of his heart, for her rule, at the least, is so wide. Love is good, he would say, even as virtue is lovely. Virtue shall see in love a kindred monarch with whom she cannot be at enmity. But woe's me! the treachery of one of the emperors is wide noted, and it were best to let conscience speak for herself. The rebels to nature, she will say, those who do not obey the law sunlit in their hearts, strive for their own destruction, strive for an illusion, for a painted idol thing, but so sweet—how or why, do you or I know, or the next man we may encounter? He is an idol; we have made him; he has never come down from heaven, is no great god, not even a heathen light or life-giver; he is only our poor fool's-dream; yet (and here is a touch by which Sidney is separated from the later Puritans) we have made him, and we can but adore him.

Then Sidney was not only in love with love, but with that other idol, a woman. And his opinion of that woman, whether true or false, casts a light into his own heart. Stella may well have been worthy of his ideal. While her subsequent life does not suggest a woman afraid of the too-intimate touch of love, she may indeed have reached that questionable fortitude too late to mend or mar her first lover's happiness. Was she a far-off lover of love, whose eyes are wet with old tales, even while the timorous heart dares not beat too fast for the love which waits at the gate? Perhaps! that was the fashion of *Astrophel's* heart, and the heart of his great race.

The Continental objects to English morality because the Puritan Englishman is willing to quiet rebellious instincts by half-indulgence—a sort of moral inoculation against the fiercer maladies of the soul, an appeasing which may or may not be effective according to the nature of the hunger it quiets or quickens. Much of Cromwell's policy, and a few dark places in the fair fame of Milton, become clearer if we look to Sidney for our interpreter.

He is also of his race, and the Puritan element in it, by the sudden flights of unexpected feeling from a nature generally quiescent:

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climbst the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face!
What! may it be that even in heavenly place
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries!
Sure, if that long with love acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feelst a lover's case.

Though there is a chill across the page in the courtly complaining which follows, this is as genuine a longing, as sweet a part in the harmony of the unattainable as ever sung out of an aching heart. The music dies, the cry cannot be sustained for fourteen lines; but it comes again and again; very soon, in one pure line:

That I had been more foolish or more wise!

His courage is of a finer quality than the courage which we most often think of as Puritan; it includes a willingness to treat his high resolves and human lapses with the same candour:

Virtue awake! Beauty but beauty is;
I may, I must, I can, I will, I do
Leave following that which it is gain to miss.
Let her do! Soft, but here she comes! Go to,
Unkind, I love you not! O me! that eye
Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie!

Our English mind seems to be losing this power of dealing comprehensively with conduct; we either turn away from moral questions as tiresome things not be expressed without over-nasality, or else we fasten our eyes zealously upon one side of them, and are afraid of comprehensive thought in the matter where comprehensive thought is of the greatest moment. But Sidney was of an earlier day:

So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,
As fast thy virtue bends that love to good,
But ah, Desire still cries, 'Give me some food!'

Such candour, far removed as it is from the boastfulness of evil hearts, is full of charm; for it does not banish the high

ideal of Sidney's character which the world has always possessed to realize the full import of his confessions. Whatever inference may be drawn from them to derogate from the honour of the poet is blotted out by what he lets be seen of Stella's own opinion of him. Her conduct during that difficult wooing was dignified and wisely constrained. While it may be doubted if Sidney's heart ever made in good earnest the choice of Anthony, his protestations were made to another man's wife, confessedly in love with him; it is superfluous to say that they were perilous in such circumstances. Stella might easily have made more of them than charming phrases. Her love for Sidney seems, however, to have been so tinged with reverence that she dared not lower herself to his secret heart. Sidney, the knight beyond reproach rather than Sidney the courtier, was somehow the Sidney she saw and loved; and she resisted the importunity of the lesser man that she might be worshipped by the greater. The woman he loved saw in Astrophel what the world saw in him then and sees in him now, the man of honour and grace, the man of delicate conscience.

You know how large a share of life Arnold distributed to the realm of conduct — full three-fourths. As a matter of fact, conduct, largely considered, is nearly all of life: we are always doing well, or ill, or indifferently. But conduct, if we mean by that our conscientious adjustment to nature and society, has, perhaps, so small a part of life that ancestral prejudice might be unkindly jostled if people could be made to realize quite how small it is! How often do you or I act with reference to nature's or society's demands? We adjust ourselves to those demands, it is true, in a rough way; but it is largely an instinctive, quite conscienceless adjustment. But conduct is interesting. It was interesting to men of Sidney's stamp above all. The English Renaissance blended the dawn-song of Italy with the rude awakening of the North. It gave a fervour to the delicacy of the South, replaced the bloodthirsty zeal of Scotland by amenity. It was not weak in morality; but it was calm enough to recognize that conscious morality is not three-fourths of life; it could stand aside and study conduct as a most seriously engaging comedy. One side of this pleasant awakening was

indeed the Puritan sense for righteousness, a sense which became more and more morbid, less and less comprehensive. Sidney, like Spenser and Chapman, among Renaissance Englishmen, stands with the Puritan, but with the earlier Puritan, to whom breadth of view was not impossible. He is not blinded by that little facet of life which the later Puritan saw fit to emphasize, nor too anxious to save his own soul. The spirit of revolt, the desire to see the other sides of life, however one may become bewildered in the confusing gleams, Hawthorne imagined to remain, long after Sidney's day, among the bitter secretaries of New England. This spirit, this desire, strains at the leash in Sidney's verse as it strained in the ardent heart of Hester Prynne. If fate had not been so kind, if Stella had preferred the courtier to the Christian, perhaps — it is reverently said — perhaps he, too, might have found in his weakness a consecration of its own.

A large *perhaps*! The gods spoke otherwise. What they kept back until their day was failure in desire, success in conscience; and two sonnets nearer Shakespeare than any other which I know (compared by the wise to Shakespeare's two superb sonnets on Lust and Death, and of kindred theme) reveal in what mood he bade the last farewell to love. One may say he bade farewell to love; for these sonnets breathe a finer spirit than the love of this earth, the fervour of a purified spirit for a kindred soul.

In one his own poor instinct is laid bare with a sense of truth such as only great men possess. That he has yielded his soul to the tyranny of desire is confessed with simplicity; there is no whimpering overwrought remorse, but calm words of penitence; and the close is an eloquent triumph. This sonnet, though not so well known as its companion, will ever seem finer to the humanist. To the Christian, the other farewell to love, with its splendid appeal to a higher love, may yield more consolation; and he will forgive those final words of regret — half renunciation, as of a life-satisfied Pagan about to quit the light of day and love:

Splendidis Longum Valedico Nugis.

JAMES BRANNIN.

Washington, D. C.